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ABSTRACT

Hearing impaired children from birth to age 5 in rural areas throughout the state of Utah are served by a home-based program which trains parents to communicate effectively with their hearing impaired child. The program is based on the following premises: (1) the preschool years are critical for developing communication skills; (2) the home is the most natural and effective setting for intervention with infants and very young children; (3) parents are the most important teachers of communication skills; and (4) intervention should take advantage of daily family activities and spontaneous opportunities for communication in the home. Services are provided by a part-time parent advisor, recruited and trained in each rural area where hearing impaired children reside. Supervision of the parent advisors (all with a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a related field) is provided by a full time staff member and includes weekly phone calls, written reports, home visits, and quarterly staff meetings. The goal of the program is to develop the most efficient and effective communication system for each child. Intervention includes audiological evaluation, hearing aid evaluation, psychological services, and total communication programs for children without the auditory capacity for aural/oral language. (JHZ)

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THE FUTURE IS WITH US

SERVICING THE HEARING IMPAIRED CHILD AND HIS FAMILY IN RURAL AREAS

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SERVICING THE HEARING IMPAIRED CHILD AND
HIS FAMILY IN RURAL AREAS

Introduction

The changing role of the family of a hearing impaired child has long been a matter of great concern. In recent years the trend has moved toward parental interest and parental needs over the needs of the child. Wise adjustments are being made toward service availability to both the parents and the hearing impaired child in rural areas.

A working model for outreach services has been established through a parent-infant program. This model provides:

a) Services to the child in his own home.

b) Uses local resource personnel.

c) Is a cost effective program.

Rationals for Home Intervention

The social forces of a community have always had a tremendous effect upon the education of the community. The education of the hearing impaired is no exception.

The Parent-Infant Program involves two approaches. First, it is obvious that communication is a necessary requisite for life functioning - for which language is the primary vehicle.

Without language, society as it is today, could not have been conceived. We acquire language gradually from the moment we are born, apparently with no effort and almost without notice of it.

Recognizing the very important role of language is the satisfaction of one of man's greatest needs (that of communication). It becomes clear that adequate language development in the child is essential. The very early period of a child's life, from birth to the age of five, seems to be the most critical not only for his general development but especially for his cognitive and linguistic growth.

Thus, before entering school, a child has already developed a sophisticated language system which is adequate for linguistic thought process : and on which formalized schooling will have little effect.

Parents are directly involved in the stimulation process which takes place in the home. We feel that parent-child interaction in a home setting is more natural and provides many more opportunities for spontaneous communication.

Because this development does occur within the natural home setting an effective program must (1) start intervention for the linguistically deprived child as close to birth as possible; (2) take place within the home environment; (3) solicit the parent as the main vehicle for language modeling; and (4) be provided in as natural a way as possible.

Meeting the Needs of These Children

A. Home Based

A home based program allows parents to become directly involved in the stimulation process which takes place in the home. We feel that parent-child interaction in a home setting is more natural and provides many more opportunities for spontaneous communication. In this way, daily family activities such as eating, playing, bathing and dressing become more meaningful to the child when the family shares and talks about the activity with him.

Besides the training for the development of language and communication skills, he also receives training in other areas if it is considered necessary.

The summation of a home based program is to have the parents directly involved with their child in the development of language skills. Another major aspect in a home based program is to be aware of the parents feelings and attitudes toward their hearing-impaired child and provide the necessary support program.

B. Bi-partisan - The Method of Communication

For a hearing-impaired child, our goal is the development of the most efficient, effective communication method for each individual child. Immediately upon entry into the program, the child is fitted with loaner aids from the parent-infant program's bank of loaner aids. Three to four sets of aids are tried and a recommendation for purchase of aids is made.

After full time wearing of aids has been established, parents are taught how to evoke and encourage the child's auditory/listening skills. This process also facilitates evaluation of the child's capacity to develop aura/oral language.

For children who do not have the auditory capacity for aural/oral language, a total communication program is introduced. Parents are taught to use Signing Exact English along with lip reading, speech and hearing aids; and video cassette plus 56 tape lessons are made available for parents use in the home.

Thus, the home becomes a linguistically meaningful environment for the child using the most appropriate communicative method for him.

The Facilitator of Services

The person who provides the services to the parents in their home is a part-time Parent Advisor. The part-time Parent Advisor works under the direction of the program coordinator. The Parent Advisor must have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a related field. The Parent Advisor's are recruited and trained in each local area where hearing-impaired children reside.

This gives the parents an opportunity to build trust and confidence in the person providing the services as well as in the program.

The Parent Advisor visits the home once a week on a regular scheduled routine.

Inservice training is provided routinely to all Parent Advisors in the rural areas.

The Parent-Infant Program is a very cost effective program. The program is able to provide services to all identified hearing-impaired children throughout the State at a cost of $1,687.00.

Supervision

In a program that serves wide geographic areas, a systematic supervision program is necessary to insure optimal operation of the program.

Supervision is provided by the full-time parent advisor supervisor. This is accomplished through four main avenues of supervision:

1. Supervisory phone calls on a weekly basis.
2. Supervisory visits with parent advisors to the homes.
3. Weekly and monthly reports sent to the office.
4. Quarterly staff meetings.

Assessment/Evaluation

It is of vital importance that an accurate record of child and parent progress be kept.

Children are evaluated upon entrance to the program and every three months thereafter. Behavioral information is gathered and used every week in monitoring progress of the child and his parents and in constructing an individualized plan of treatment.

Support Services

Audiological services for the program include initial diagnostic services, ON-GOING audiological testing and hearing aid service.

Psychological services are viewed as an essential part of an infant intervention program. Therefore, psychological services are provided in rural areas by part-time psychologists.

Movement from Home Intervention to School

We know that families are an essential part of the educational process. The type of school that the child attends may be a special school, regular school, public school or a private school. In a rural setting not all of these types of schools are available. Cooperation between the family, the Parent-Infant Program and the school system is necessary to maximize the child's potential. All must share common knowledge and plan the child's educational future together. The Parent-Infant Program will help determine the proper school placement for the child to have a successful educational experience.

Issues to Consider - Pitfalls

Some of the issues that one may find difficult to pursue in a rural setting are:

1. Recruiting the quality of personnel.
2. Providing parent group meetings and proper support systems.
3. Working with uncooperative parents.
4. Maintaining proper supervision from a home-base.
5. Cooperation and coordination within a school district.
6. Maintaining the proper school placement for future educational growth.

A RURAL PROGRAM

Out in rural UTAH, live parents - all alone
All alone - with their child that someone said could not hear
For a long time these disgruntled parents
Cried and frowned - but mostly waited, for many and many a year!

"I need your help," they urgently cried
"I, please, would like your help today!"
Is there anyone - just anyone - who
Could come and help us on our way?

Time went on, the days rolled by
And meetings were held, and meetings were held right there.
Until one day - some thoughts were born!
And a new program we have to share.

Now the parents are very happy ---And so are we
But our work has really just begun.
Now if you'll listen to what I have to say
You'll hear of some wonderful things that can be done!

By - Skip Reese